

S1:E12 - educating-the-next-generation-on-antiracism-and-uni...

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SPEAKERS

Tesha Fitzgerald, Jennifer Malcolm

J Jennifer Malcolm 00:10
Welcome to the Jennasis Speaks podcast, The Transformative Power of Women's Stories, a platform that empowers women storytelling to promote collective vulnerability, acceptance and healing. I am your host, Jennifer Malcolm, self made entrepreneur, women advocate and life balance expert. Welcome back to the next episode of Jennasis Speaks podcast the transformative power of women stories, where every woman has a story and every story matters. I'm your host, Jennifer Malcolm, and we're so excited to walk them Tesha Fitzgerald to the show today. tesha just released her first book a couple weeks ago, entitled, anti racism and Universal Design for Learning, building expressways for success. She is an educator and administrator and a work advocating for the success of Black and Brown students is something to be admired and emulated. Welcome, Tesha, it's so great to have you here today on the podcast. All right. So welcome. Today, you've been a part of Jennasis Speaks one form or another for four or five years, like I said, and we're just taking this to the next level.

T Tesha Fitzgerald 01:18
I'm so excited to be part of the evolution of Jennasis.



Jennifer Malcolm 01:21

I love it. And so for context with the listeners, we have done two women's conferences, we partnered with Western Reserve, a hospital down in the Akron area. And Kathy romito, my friend and colleague, she was our host. And we just came in on two different one, two different years, we came in and brought different women speakers. Vantage, I think you were part of the second one. Yes, I was. And I didn't really know you. And I was amazed by your energy, your support, I think you had like four tables in the back room, your support groupback there, but welcome, I'm really honored to have you here today.



Tesha Fitzgerald 02:01

It's such a great opportunity, you always create create such great spaces for women, to bring their authentic selves, like we don't have to have it all figured out. We can have struggles, we can have ideas, we can have nothing at all and just come. So thank you for creating spaces for women, that allow us to just be our selves,



Jennifer Malcolm 02:19

You are most welcome. So some entry will start some introductory easy questions of who you are. I know that you live in the Cleveland area now, but just a little bit about your history upbringing, to get the audience up to speed of who you are.



Tesha Fitzgerald 02:34

So my name is Andratesha Fitzgerald, I have two really creative parents. I was born in the 70s. So I guess they just put a few names together, you know, and named me after everyone. So, but I grew up in inner city, Cleveland, near downtown. And, you know, in my neighborhood, there were lots of different distractions, lots of different things. I remember walking home from school one day, and I used to take the bus to school. And when I would get off, sometimes now the rules were, you don't take the shortcuts, you take the main roads, and you come straight home. And the shortcut was just so annoying. So I remember that there was a path of footpath through a field that connected to the street. So I kind of cut through the path and thought, What's the big deal, I cut through the field there, and I made it home and half the time. And the next day on the news, there was a prostitute murdered in that same little area. So it gave me a sense of urgency. It gave me a sense of why the rules existed for me. And I think sometimes for youth growing up in areas where there's a lot of trouble and a lot of distractions, he can feel normal. But that incident, I just remember realizing, okay, there's some dangerous situations around me. And I need to be more aware of why I can do this or can't do this or why the rules are, what they are. We have some light sensors. I'll fix those in a minute. But as as I grew and

understood where I was coming from, it became so important for me to succeed. It's so important for me to take my education seriously. And important for me to always have a connection to where I'm from not too many people when they achieve a certain amount of success. They feel like they have to disconnect from the past. But I felt a very strong impetus to stay connected to my neighborhood to the struggles that I saw, to all of the things that could have been distractions. I needed to stay connected some way and I found that that way was education. So That's, that's where my love for education started.

J Jennifer Malcolm 05:02

That's awesome. And so you grew up in the in Cleveland, your brothers and sisters tell us a little bit more about growing up because I love the the shortcuts you know, as a kid, you're like, I'm just gonna hit the shortcut. It's faster parents worry too much anyway, so let's just keep going. And I'm better, faster, smarter than my parents anyway. So let me just get them up to speed. But what was your like childhood growing up with your parents, parents, family, siblings,

T Tesha Fritzgerald 05:28

I grew up in inner city, Cleveland. And mostly I live with my mom. And there are periods of time where I live with my grandmother, and my great grandmother. And I do have brothers and sisters. But we have a blended family model, which I actually really love that, you know, my sisters, from my dad's side, we always have a joke, like, Oh, we have our own moms, but we share a dad and then my sister on my mom's side, we always joke that we, you know, have our own dads, but we share mom. So because of that, our family expands and all of us get along. And we are all very close. And so growing up, we had meeting places where sometimes we will meet at my paternal grandfather's grandmother's home, and my sister from my mom's side will also come and spend the weekend there. And so our family structure really gave me some insight to what a support network looks like. There was never a time as a young person that if I slipped, or if I was off track, I knew that there was a community coming for me. And so it made me think really wisely about my decisions. But it also gave me a number of role models to see resilience in action. My great grandmother on my mother's side, I spent lots of time with her. My mom and dad had me right at the end of their senior year in high school. So they had me really young. And my dad went to college, and then he went off to the military. And my mom pursued the workforce, and she did college as well. So during that time, they left me to spend lots of precious time with my great grandmother, who was alive until 2005, actually, and so in spending time with her, she would invest these rich stories of our family heritage. And she one day I was sitting on the couch, I think I was maybe nine or 10 years old. And she emerged from her room in the back. And she said, you have to promise me that you will

remember these family stories. So as a 10 year old, you kind of like Oh, sure, Yes, I remember the story, Grandma, you would then tell me these stories. And I would think you told me this one already. But because she told them to me over and over again. My assumption at that time was that everybody knew those stories. But in reality, she was investing them in me. And so there are many stories, and my grandmother is still alive. So I tell my grandmother stories that my great grandmother told me, and she's like, I have never heard this before. I'm like, well, granny told me. And then when I tell her the names of the people in the place that she's like, okay, that must be correct, because this one is this one's brother. And this one is this one sister. And I didn't realize at the time, how greatly those stories would become a treasure to me, and also a roadmap for my life. One story in particular. And when she taught, she taught me how to read, and she also taught my sister, my younger sister how to read as well. And she shared with us the importance of knowing what's in front of you and being able to distinguish those words. And she shared with us that her mother was the daughter of slaves. And her father went on to become one of the first professors at Tuskegee Institute. Tuskegee Institute has a rich history of investing in the education of black farmers were sharecroppers at the time. So when I went back and looked on the census records as well, after my great grandmother passed, her father, at the age of seven on his census, was one of two people in his household that could read and write. And so her mom, totally illiterate, couldn't even sign her name. She had to put an X and just trust that what was on the paper, was whatever the people communicate it to her for her father, very educated, knew math very well knew the Bible, by heart could read could communicate at the marketplace in ways that made him the target of ridicule because his mind was so sharp. And so she invested these kinds of stories in me to say if you want to know what What it is that you're signing, if you want to be on the offensive to your life, then learn to read. And so I took that to heart, and everywhere we went, no matter what we were doing, there was always a book, in my grandmother's hand when she will ride the public transportation with me. She always had a book. I remember she subscribed to the double de Book of the Month Club. So she would get a book every month, some books, she was thrilled by others, she would give a scathing review. There, they better be lucky, there was no good reads when granny was alive. But she was an avid reader. And I remember even before I could read, I would always get materials and turn the pages just to be emulating the actions that she was doing. Very smart woman. She, her name is Amanda Smith. And I remember her telling me that she had been trained in so many different areas. She was an artist. Her art was hung in the rotunda, down at the courthouse. But she, when she had her children, she learned to weld, she was a welder, trained as a welder. Now, again, she was born in 1916. So this was early on welding was not a traditional position held by a woman, but she was so good. They allowed her to do that. And because she could not, they functioned on a swing shift. So she will have to work days sometimes and nights sometimes, but with small children, she couldn't do that. So she left that job. And the only work she could find the only work other

than that was to scrub floors on her hands and knees. So she scrub floors for very little money to make a way for her family. So she's just a picture of resilience that I've always just treasured. You know,



Jennifer Malcolm 12:08

and, and the word that I jotted down, as you're talking about her was that she was giving you legacy deposits. So the Yes, three from the past of Don't, don't forget, remember, you know, it's almost like the scribes of history and, and cultures of you know, writing down the stories and making sure that that that isn't lost from generation to generation. And she's reaching back from behind in the history that she was a part of, or even potentially before her time and just a passing them into your heart and your soul and your memory and what a gift it is. Now I'm sure to tell your mom and your other people in your family of those legacy deposits, that she just invested in you. So that's powerful.



Tesha Fritzgerald 12:52

I love to hear my children tell my great grandmother stories back to me. They can imitate her voice. They know the things that she loved the things that she can't stand. And there are moments when my daughter reminds me so much of her. And my daughter was born a year after my great grandmother passed. So they never met. But there's some kind of transition that happened because transaction, she reminds me so much of my great grandmother.



Jennifer Malcolm 13:19

Amazing. And I loved your comment about Goodreads because my 15 year old and I she got me on Goodreads, and she is an avid reader. She reads between 40 and 60 books a year. So she just consumes consumes and so I made a commitment to 20 books in 2020. So I was gonna read 20 books in 2020. And so I got all on Goodreads. And I will read to paint literally read two pages, and I will do my update, like update two pages. And she was making fun of me this past weekend of like, Mom, you don't have to do it like every bookmark. And I was like, No, I am because I'm very proud of my progress,



Tesha Fritzgerald 13:53

progress is progress.



Jennifer Malcolm 13:55

I will take but I guess she gets notifications. And she's like 101 103 107, she's got 100. So but but I love that your grandma, great grandma invested in money and in a club to bring books in that she's investing in you for that those legacy deposits. And it formulated your DNA in such a way where you're a teacher now and an advocate for youth. So why don't you share with the audience a little bit of how you started your career path, and kind of your journey up until recently and it kind of you're always working, you're always reaching forward into learning more and achieving more. So what you share that part of your story?



Tesha Fritzgerald 14:39

Sure. Well, I started off actually when I went to college, I had been in programs from seventh grade to 12th grade for engineering. I was pretty good at math and science. I love science a lot. I love to learn how things work. So I thought, well, I'm I'm going to be an engineer. So I had Amazing internships at NASA were shout out to the advanced communication technology satellite crew, we literally navigated a satellite and acquired the telemetry and learned lots of things to integrate data and voice over one platform. And I thought to myself, at the end of that summer, if I was supposed to be an engineer, then this would be the coolest job ever. And while I was there, it was fantastic money for a college freshman. Lots of money, yes. Fine summer a bit. But it just, I found that very early on that money was not a motivator for me. And so then I said, Okay, well, perhaps the NASA position, there were lots of things that happen at NASA. I encountered this resistance to my presence. And the funny thing is that, watching Hidden Figures, I thought, wow, that movie was set in 1968. But in 1997, I had a very similar experience. And I learned I couldn't tell, when I was in engineering, if people were against me, because I was black, or because I was young, or because I was from America, or because I was a woman, or perhaps all four, I was not sure. I just knew that the environment for me at that time, while there were some super supportive people at NASA, and I connected with other young black engineers, or aspiring engineers, who to this day are lifelong friends. I just knew the career field for me. Engineering was not it. Sure. And because I wasn't certain I wanted to make sure the next summer, I did another internship in the chemical engineering department at Cleveland State and, and politic, it was a minority owned engineering firm downtown, really cool experience. And I had a chance to correct some of the drawings for Windermere reputation, which is right down the road from where I work. And so great experience, but again, it just didn't get to the core of the love. So what I will just pause and say, is, if women are listening, and you're in a career that feels like, you have to make that choice, or you're stuck in it, just explore what it is that your heart naturally leans toward. For me, I kept thinking about literature and reading books and writing poetry. And, wow, I'm interning in the chemical engineering department. And so I said, you know, I'm in chemical engineering, this my major, I have an engineering scholarship, but my heart is

saying that this is not the right decision for me. So I had the wonderful luxury of having this conversation with my parents about, I really have to change my major because my heart is just not in it. And in my head, I had already carved out a response that they were going to give me I thought they will be angry with me, they had nothing but support for me. And so my mom and my dad, both were like, please do what makes your heart happy. But do something just don't drop out. So

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Jennifer Malcolm 18:09

that's really important, because I'm going to pause and interrupt you just for a second. Because that support of Okay, your age, you're going you're you're in college and pursuing something, and you're not passionate, like walking it through, you know, I have an eight year old, seven year old, we just took off to college. And we, you know, they both had their intense of what they wanted to be, and we said it's probably gonna change two to three to four times over the course of the next several years. And that's okay, as long as you contribute to society. You're not living in my basement, self sufficient, you know, the world, the world can be whatever and to find those passions in your heart and to have your parents respond to you in a positive manner that says, You know what, keep going, we gotcha. Versus we hear the other stories of, you know, you're locked in and something that you're not passionate about. So

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Tesha Fitzgerald 19:01

I think the most powerful takeaway was that in my head, I had already scripted this dialogue that did not exist. And so I had to be careful not to count out support before even giving it a chance to play out. And when I talked with them very supportive, I changed my major to English. And I remember my grandmother asking me, Well, what are you going to do with that? I really, I really didn't have answers. And I wasn't quite sure. But my senior year, there was a program called upper bound is a federal program for either first generation college student potentials or for low income students, mostly intercity, and be the coordinator of the program asked me to be their residential coordinator. So I lived in residence with 100 teenagers 14 to about 17 Are 18 I lived with them 24 seven for six weeks. We did send them home on Saturday on Friday nights. And then they came back Sunday. And yes, all day and all night. And the funniest thing is that, you know, chasing them around and talking to them about school and listen to their music and let them make fun of me for learning their new dances or whatever I had the time of my life. And I realized that I wanted to work with youth, I wanted to make an impact on youth, I could do it forever. That summer, I didn't get paid very much. Not at all, like the NASA summer owl. But I enjoyed every minute of it, I enjoyed the interactions, I enjoy seeing the light bulb go off for them, I enjoy talking with them about their future aspirations. And so I didn't

really know what to do with that I thought maybe I want to be a counselor of some sort or kind of work with the TRIO program. I wasn't sure. And I was in the elevator going to class in the fall. And I saw a flyer for a program called the master of urban secondary teaching. And I took the whole flyer with me. And I thought, okay, so it was a master's program, it was one year. And it was mostly for people who were doing like a career change. They evaluated my transcript and they asked me, Well, do you want to be a science teacher because I have so much science and math. And I know I didn't want to do that. But I had a degree in English or I was pursuing a degree in English at the time. And I said, Well, I would like to, you know, try maybe teaching English. And so I signed up for the program got in, and my heart knew that I was exactly where I needed to be. And so I did my student teaching in East Cleveland schools. And I have been in East Cleveland school since 2001. I and when I tell you that the students that I've met here, the connections, the investment that the district has made in me, really confirmed that engineering was not where I was supposed to be. The good thing is that my engineering training I bring with me to everything I do. So I'm always solving problems, looking for solutions, thinking about different ways to do things. Even in the classroom, I will say, Oh, well, let's try this, or let's do it this way. Or can we try this? And for some people, they were like, what is this all about? We've done it this way forever. And I just wanted to find ways to reach students, it didn't have to be done before it could fail miserably. It's okay. And I found this tribe of teachers in the district that were willing to try anything with me. And they would have crazy stuff that they were doing, like, well come to my class, if you're if you're not teaching this period, come on in. And I will go in and see just different methods, different ways to reach kids, I would see teachers who would literally show up in a kid's classroom, because they had a connection with the kid just to say, Oh, I just, I'm just checking in on you. And so those things, that kind of tribe around me, I was able to try different methods, try different activities. I turned everything into a song or a dance. And one of our professors, his name is Christine Zen cough. He called it dark power. So I would do anything in front of the kids. I remember one time in particular, I was teaching a lesson about irony. And I was singing some songs. And I was doing like the running man in front of the class. And you know how kids get that look on their face, and you kind of know somebody who's behind you. And I turned slightly, and it was my supervisor. And he didn't mind but it was just the fact that I was caught dancing by adults. Usually I'm fine dancing in front of the kids. But so I've been in East Cleveland, I started as a teacher, and then moved into administration at the building level for curriculum. And that gave me a chance to really rally teachers around reaching students in the way that they need us to. And that's social emotionally, academically, with restructuring, tradition, and lots of things and from there moved into a district level curriculum position. And at the district level, I've done curriculum mixed with federal program. So I oversee the grants for the district. And just recently, I moved into the Human Resources position, but I bring with me, you know, the curriculum, I still love to get in classrooms. And also, I found a new passion for really helping teachers discover how to

reach kids. So that's what I've been up to.

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Jennifer Malcolm 24:55

It's great and I love I put a few notes down again and it sounds like you Your, your engineering background really gave you innovation for creative problem solving, that it gets you outside the mindset that just because it's been done one way or this is, this is the the A, B to C to D method doesn't mean it's the only way or the best way. And I think that problem solving, innovative mindset that you can bring to the table, you're always pulling from the past to bring it into the current. And I was laughing because when you're talking about your call for youth, like you just knew, like, once you were in there, and you're around this, the students, my sister and her husband have been youth pastors for decades now and, and I won't disclose my brother in law's age, he's Filipino, he looks a lot younger than he is. Because he is aged very well. And so. But we went to Lakeside about a month ago, and every evening, he is out on the sand volleyball courts with these 14 1516 1820 he loves it. And I made this comment to Chad and said, you know, yeah, I love my three teenagers, most days, most days, most days, I don't have it in me to like go on vacation, and then pour, you know, my heart out again into more youth and but I know that when you have that calling for youth, you see them everywhere you see them in the classroom, you're always connecting, you have your dark power, and probably your cape that goes into I'm gonna sing and dance to connect. And however, way to pull down barriers and bring that trust and, and vulnerability to that conversation. And so hats off to you because those who are called to you, I love women women's broad category. When I say I want to empower women, that's a really broad category. But you're this it's a tough nut and, and that's hats off to you. Because when you know, you know, and you were courageous enough to continue to pursue that.

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Tesha Fritzgerald 26:58

Yeah, if I mean being able to impact you, and to honor their stories enough to intersect with them, has been life giving for me, and I have two teenagers at home. They don't think I'm as cool. But every time we see my students out and or, you know, like, well, we were at Starbucks, and one of my students was the cashier. She's like, almost richer. And they're like, Oh, they think I'm like the lamest person in the world. But they do listen to my students say, Oh, she was so fun in the classroom, and they have a little different experience to share. But um, you know, I love it. And I love that it's not isolated, calling that when your call to you, or when you're calling to women, you know, you find people who just have that, like mine that want to tackle those issues that don't mind to get in the sludge with you a little bit. And those people I'm telling you have been when I look back on the time in the classroom or even my time in administration in the district is those

people who walk with you day by day, who take you as your who listened to your rants, and then get you back on track. Like they have been the difference makers,

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Jennifer Malcolm 28:16

right? No, it's funny because I will be in the same camp as you my teenagers do not think I'm cool whatsoever. And I'll have their friends over. I'll put the music on. I have my little dances that I do around the home. And I always tell them like you have the coolest hippest mom around and they're like, you are the biggest dork ever. And I make their friends laugh. I don't usually make them laugh. They usually you're you know, duck down. But you're not the only mom out there that your teenagers don't think you're cool. So

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Tesha Fritzgerald 28:43

they better they better recognize. We are cool girls

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Jennifer Malcolm 28:47

We are we are very cool. And I know my kids have been listening to girls especially I've been listening on and off to the podcast and you know, Paige and Reagan yo yo, some people call mom here so you don't don't forget that.

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Tesha Fritzgerald 28:58

Yes, that's right.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 29:01

Over the last six to 12 months, you've been very diligent about creating work and creating a create a book. And through Facebook over the last month you did the countdown of days to the big reveal. And then you did the big reveal. And I want you to take some time to tell the audience about your book. And really the why behind your book. So yes, you you're a published author now, but really the the why and the fire in your belly of putting this book out.

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Tesha Fritzgerald 29:29

So the name of the book is anti racism and Universal Design for Learning, building expressways to success. And basically this is a book to help equip teachers to make classrooms safe and honoring spaces for black and brown children. I think the impetus

behind the book was looking at the data. When I looked at the data and I saw that black or brown children were suspended at a rate of three times their white counterparts and also saw that black and brown children were over identified for special education services. And at the same time, denied spaces in AP advanced placement or gifted programming. And I thought to myself, you know, the students that I've served in East Cleveland, in the greater Cleveland area, are of the most bright and talented, gifted students. But we are not using tools to access their giftedness, or to pick up their intelligence in a way that broadcasts it to the world. And so I wanted to write a book, to give teachers tools and strategies to really reach children where they are to really bring out their giftedness, because many times kids are diagnosed with a disability, but it's really not a disability, there's just a lack of good teaching or a lack of being reached. And to me, that's an area where we're not honoring who people are, we're not honoring children for what they bring to us. But we're penalizing them because they don't think like a test maybe points out, or we don't give them other opportunities to broadcast their brilliance in a way that makes sense to them. And so, I thought about for my own kids, I have a 12 year old and a 13 year old, and they both shine in really different ways. And so my son, if you give him lines to memorize and a stage, he will interpret them, he'll give you the emotion, he'll give you tears if you give them just a few moments, but he can bring a character to life. If you put my daughter on stage, she will totally bomb. That's not the way she's wired. If you give her an opportunity to design something, to shape something a little differently, to do some trial and error to come up with ways to improve a process. She will amaze you. And so I think about for each child that's in any school or in any classroom, how can we, as an educational entity, make sure that all children have the opportunity to shine in a way that they're wired to. That is where honor and respect come in. That is where the anti racism comes in. Because black and brown children, many times are penalized for nothing other than the color of their skin. And that has to stop. There's no room for racism in the world. But there is really no room for racism in the schools. And so as we build the next generation of leaders and learners and speakers and presidents and lawyers and doctors, every child needs the opportunity to shine in the way that they were wired. And that's really why I wrote the book.



Jennifer Malcolm 32:48

That's powerful. And for the audience who is not from the Cleveland area. What is the demographics of your school, so you're at East Cleveland, but for people who aren't from Ohio, or from this area, that what is the demographics of your school district.



Tesha Fritzgerald 33:03

So East Cleveland is a inner ring suburb of the Cleveland area. And it is about three miles

total. So it's a very small district, we have about 99% African American, and about 9995 to 99% at the free or reduced lunch eligibility rate. Our city was named the fourth poorest city in the country. And that has no bearing on the excellence that comes from here. And what I really wish people knew is that zip code of skin color and socio economic status has no bearing on what children can accomplish with the right support with the right network. We have kids have gone on to Ivy League schools who go to college and come back and invest in the neighborhood. At this time, there's a group of our alumni who are buying property right here in the city. Great things happen in East Cleveland every single day. Great things happen in urban schools around the country every single day. It's just up to us to keep giving students an opportunity to shine the way that they're wired to.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 34:22

And I love what you keep saying over and over the gifts and talents are in children. The gifts and talents as our God ordained within children when they're cultivated and they have the right environment. They can become anything and so that's going from white children brown black, but the stigma already against when you're poor, and you're of color, then you you're you're not going to have as many opportunities and I love that you are being a vocal piece and advocate for youth. One of the teacher but to for black and brown children. But your your Doing your book targeted at the teachers so that the, the teachers are now seeing their influence and their ability to call out future call out gifts. And we all learn. And I mean, this is this is education 101 we all learn in different manners, whether we are visual learners, auditory learners, tactile learners, we all learn in different ways. And so we all interpret data and, and give out data in different ways, even though we're showing the same data. And going even deeper than that, of, of giving opportunity. So how has this book been received so far,

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Tesha Fritzgerald 35:37

so far has been received really well got lots of just great feedback and people reaching out to say that the message really resonates. And, you know, when I think about learning, I think about learning as an express way that students get to choose the destination. For many years, people have tried to force students to college or force them to the military. And this book really just puts the student in the driver's seat to say, What is your destination? And then what is the role of the educator and helping you on that road? So yes, there's on ramps, like you said, taking the day to end and there are things that we can do to eliminate our bias to take away the barriers for every learner. And then where are the off ramps? Like, how do you want to show the world what you've learned, we have to give choices and options. And then as you're navigating on that road to success, what does your vehicle look like, and when learners learn how they learn, then their vehicle

keeps getting upgraded, because I'll know what to do for my own learning. And those are the things that are in the book, those are the strategies that I really want teachers to take home because they have to know how to empower learners to learn how they learn, because that way, that translates to the job that translates to the military, that translates to their family life, when they know what they need to do for themselves, then they'll be able to communicate, they'll be able to advocate for themselves. And ultimately, the decision to get to success or not, then lies with them. But they have the resources, the network and the empowerment to make the decision and understand what that decision means no,



Jennifer Malcolm 37:20

and that's powerful. And you and my husband would have tons of talk about because He is a professor at bom Wallace University, in the early childhood education. He's teaching the next generation of teachers how to teach and this space of from, it's not just book knowledge, it is not just what your district says is the mandated, let's get through this curriculum is on even at the state level, or what is mandated, you have to get through this curriculum. We all learn and grow in different ways we are inspired by different things, we're provoked by different things, we feel empowered to use our voice in different situations. And if you have the ability to change the DNA, or the work that teachers do, in order to not cookie cut a curriculum or outcomes, or teach to a test, and you're really investing life, like I will go back to the legacy deposits, you're putting legacy deposits into the next generation, how powerful that can be.



Tesha Fritzgerald 38:26

I thought about pre service teachers a lot when writing the book, because I thought about the actual job went to Cleveland State University, the master of urban secondary teaching program. And a lot of it talked about the hard work of teaching and the science, but it was about the heart work. And our hearts have to be in a position to mine for brilliance to look for it to literally blast away all the rock until we find where kids shine. And I think that mindset is a lot different than prepare them to take a test or refer them to special ed or they need to go over there for intervention. It says while you're with me, I will look for the jewel in you. I will find it. I will mind for I'll remind you of it. There's nothing else that I'm looking for at this deficit, but asset always there's something good in you. And I will find it and then when they know you're serious about the relationship that you have with them and not just relationship, but it's like the relationship for whatever your endgame is. So I work for you. You tell me where you want to go. And I just remember a kid I met him in the office. I was visiting a school. He was in the office and I just sat down next to him. He had no idea who I was or what I did for the district. And I asked him so what's up? Why are you

here? He said, I am in here because I don't get along with my teacher. Okay, well, you know, that's fine. I asked him a couple more questions. And then we got on the topic of what His goal was, What did he want to do? He had this idea that he wanted to have a barber shop next to a carwash he wanted them together, not one or the other, but they had to be together. Because you can go over here and get your hair cut. And then they'll take care of your car. You don't have to waste time waiting on the car. He had this all thought out, he was in the fifth or sixth grade. And this, he said, What have you shared this idea with anyone? He said, I told one person, they told me it was stupid. And I was like, well, I disagree. And he and I began to form a relationship. So he just recently graduated maybe last year or the year before last. And I will ask them from time to time I do you still want to do that. He's like, No, I don't want to do that anymore. But he still has an entrepreneurial lens. There's still something about having his own business and having two businesses in one place that just really intrigues him. And I think for him, what if education wrapped around him? What if the resources to realize that dream by the time he was in the 12th grade, we're actually available? What if we change the way we listen to students aspirations, and then we shape their educational experience around it, not pigeonholing them to one dream, but literally preparing them for a series of dreams. And that's really what I talked about in the book, just honoring students where they are empowering them to make decisions for themselves and access a resource of a network of resources, but then also releasing them to do the things that they would like to do and try to fail to start over and to be there for them at every stage of their progression.



Jennifer Malcolm 41:34

And I love that because you know, I'm an entrepreneur, I have my marketing firm, it's going on 10 years of business. I'm involved in eo which is an entrepreneurs organization. It's a global community. But there's a chapter here in Cleveland. And I thought that was the smartest idea, like to have a barber shop. And a carwash, because you're being efficient with people's time you're being respectful of their time, you stop for one, you get two services, and you're on your way, like, to me, that's brilliant, because time is a commodity that is so precious. Like I'm like, that's really smart business thinking. So whether he does that one or something similar, where you get a twofer one time, you know, something, I think it's outstanding.



Tesha Fitzgerald 42:18

He's brilliant. And most times with children, black and brown children, they're brilliant, is viewed as disrespect, they end up in the office. So he was out of the classroom, for having these ideas or assessing the situation and saying we don't have a relationship. And because he articulated that it was viewed as negative. And so this book helps teachers,

whether you're black or brown yourself, or you're white, maybe you just have a different culture. Maybe there's some disconnect, this gives teachers kind of like an on ramp to think about how do I design my classroom so that every single person that enters feels heard, feel sane, and feels valued. And then once you're safe, then we can talk about the content. We can't transmit content, when I'm afraid when I feel like there's a threat, when I feel that you and I don't like each other. There's no learning that can happen in that environment. And so building these expressways really starts with hearing each other speaking to one another, and teaching explicitly those skills that translate into relationship, but then move more into empowering.



Jennifer Malcolm 43:28

So and I know that you and my husband would have so much to talk about in this room, because the piece that when you are sharing your story before about knowing your students, you're talking about servant leadership you're talking about I'm not getting my students to my outcomes, I am serving them to pull out of them the gold the treasures, and then find that those tools to help and to be a catalyst for what's already in their heart to get them from point A to point B or to across the finish line. So that's powerful. So you had a very significant person, write the introduction to your book. And can you share a little bit about your connection with her? the why behind that? And a little bit of insight to that.



Tesha Fitzgerald 44:17

So I'm still just thrilled at you know how some stuff happens. And you can't even believe that it happened. But Somalia rice, the mother of Tamir Rice and Tamir Rice was murdered by police officers in Cleveland. He was 12 years old. And his mom sumeria wrote the foreword to my book. And the reason why I'm just so grateful that she would lend her voice to the book, but she wrote an article in Essence magazine where she talked about Tamir, and she talked about his love of the arts, and she is a champion for arts education also for wraparound services. She recently started the Tamir Rice fund And, you know, his story has impacted so many people. I don't know if many people know this. But in Jordan, there is a playground dedicated to Tamir Rice. And his story just gives people the passion to continue to fight for rights pacifically for juveniles. But what I love about sumeria is that she definitely challenges educators, she speaks to educators about the importance of incorporating arts and movement into education. And so I thought it was a natural fit that someone who fights for the rights of black and brown children every single day, and, you know, she, there was that tragedy. And there was this morning, Cleveland as a community mourned with her. And now, she's a fighter, and an activist, and Cleveland as a community fights with her, were activists with her. So for us to partner together to really

equip teachers to learn how to work with black and brown children has been a great joy. I've enjoyed every conversation I've had with her. But mostly her resilience is a picture of what all children need, we need to know that. And adults too, that we can grieve. And we can take that time to grieve. And then we can watch our grief, transform us into serving others. And that's what she's done. And so I couldn't think of a better person to write the foreword. It's good.



Jennifer Malcolm 46:33

No, it's very powerful. So what's on the next chapter of T Asia's future? I know that you're always learning, always growing, always being an advocate, for your community, for your school district for women, for for teenagers, and youth. But what's next on your horizon?



Tesha Fritzgerald 46:52

That's always a really, really tough question. One of the things that, you know, I've been teaching a course on culturally responsive teaching and universal design for learning. And those are two frameworks that I believe in at, as an advocate for educators, I believe in frameworks that give them the freedom to design experiences. So I know that I'll be teaching a course based on anti racist education and Universal Design for Learning here soon. And so I'm just trying to find ways to reach teachers, both pre service and in the classroom, so that they'll understand the role that each of us has, and designing learning experiences for students that are free from our biases, free from our barriers, when we are the barrier, being able to recognize it, and then showcasing what those students can do when they have the right supports in place. And so my dream is to help teachers tell their students stories and help students find ways to just shine. Awesome.



Jennifer Malcolm 47:55

Who or what inspires you?



Tesha Fritzgerald 48:00

Oh, man. So I will tell you that my children inspire me. I took my daughter to a conference that I was speaking at in California. And I asked her before I spoke, I said, you know, they invited me here to speak. But I would love to share the platform with you. And if there's something that you would like to share with teachers who are listening, would you consider sharing, you know, five minutes of your experience, she rocked it. And so she shared just about a time when she felt like her voice was shut down in the classroom. And then she also shared about a time when she felt like her voice was welcome in the

classroom. The funny thing is that they invited me back to speak this year, but they also invited her to speak, and to bring her friends. And so to see that, that inspires me so greatly, that she has now understood what it took me so long to understand that my voice actually matters, that I actually have something to say, and that when I say it, people will listen. And I was an adult before I felt empowered that way. She's 13. And same for my son, he has found such beautiful ways to advocate for himself. He believes and if there's something that he's uncomfortable with, I've seen him very respectfully. And sometimes, like I said, though, the way that he articulates it may be viewed as disrespect, but he has found a way to both empower himself and to speak up on the behalf of others. So what we birthed in our home, are activists, and nothing inspires me more. I am certain and I tell them all the time, I am certain that the world has to be better because you will demand it. And so they inspire me greatly to keep doing what I'm doing. They remind me that my voice has value and I forget when I get nervous when I get scared when I feel like oh, I don't know if I have anything that will be important. It's them who sit with me and speak over me That you have something to say, Mom, you can do this and to receive that inspiration from them is life giving.



Jennifer Malcolm 50:09

So good. I got goosebumps on that. Because, you know, those of you who are continuing to listen to our podcast, that is the foundation of what the purpose of the podcast, the Jennasis Movement, the Jennasis Speaks it up women's empowerment series is all about is finding voice. Every story, every woman has a story. And it could be small, it could be large, it could be self inflicted, it could be something that happened to us, it could be just how I feel. But every person matters, and every woman matters. And the the, the goal is that we're reaching women all across the globe, with this podcast, and with our work that we're continuing to build out that there is activists, there is voice, there is courage, there is healing, there is purpose, it is life giving, and to bring hope and healing and community. And we may not agree on every issue on on this podcast. But that's not the point. It's not about one, you know, vision, and but it's, it's pulling out the gold of women around the globe, to really have that confidence that your voice does matter. And I love that your children are calling that out. And you because you are a powerhouse. And to be real to say like, hey, sometimes I do get nervous, or sometimes I do question, what I have to say is important. But to really call out that courage of No, you are called, you have a purpose, you have a destiny, you have this voice and it matters. And it's important. And it's beautiful, and that you have young youth calling that out. I cannot wait to see what they're doing in 10-20-30-40 years. That's powerful.



Tesha Fitzgerald 51:53

Yes, I think that once women understand that, despite the thoughts and the the wrestling with the value, once we find a place that we have to speak up, that we have to protest that we have to become active in making change. Once we find that place, whether it's in the kitchen, or the courthouse, where there's in the classroom, or at the church, wherever it is, there is a compelling movement that can't be stopped is almost like you have to do it. And when you find that zone, that area that you know that without your voice, things will just stay the same or people will assume that things are okay. I think that that is our power zone, that's when we have to speak up, we have to stand up, we have to move differently. And that is a calling that it's up to each woman, when they accept it. When they step into the role, no one can force us into that no one can push us into that. And when we make the choice to step into it, nothing can keep us from it. That's when things begin doors begin to open, things begin to shift and change. And I found that when I started writing the book, there were so many questions in my head like what what qualifies me to share this and what what makes me different on this issue. And I had to really just trust that there was a difference that I had been making in lives for years that I've been keeping hiding under a bushel so to speak. And that this is a movement that teachers are asking for. And there's a growing a growing contingency of teachers that want to do better, but don't know what to do. That would be their condition. If I didn't write my book, that would be their condition if women don't do what it is that they are called to do. And so wherever you are, whatever it is, whatever gift it is that you've been hiding under a bushel because of insecurity, or just feeling like an imposter or feeling disqualified, or feeling like you don't know enough. Those are all lies. We need your voice. We need your voice. We need your actions. We need your words. We need your books, we need your songs, we need your dance moves, even if your kids think they're dorky. We need them. We need all of them. And so as much as I want to empower teachers, I have to empower women as well. Because women like you, Jen, and women like the teachers at my school, women at home like my mom, my grandma, my great grandma, they invested in me and with every investment comes the push you push people to be more than what they thought they could be. And then you turn around and you do that for somebody else.



Jennifer Malcolm 54:52

Powerful. Wow. Well said and And to be clear, we love men so much Have men move in at all, it's just about positioning, the calling and purpose of our lives. And if this podcast and other work that we're doing shifts your heart one degree, even if you're not ready to speak yet, even if you're like, I don't know, but it gives you one ounce of courage to step into healing, step into your calling, step into that book, the dance the relationship and get out from under that bushel. Kelly is going to love this on my team, because before we launched our first one, she's saying that whole song, she's like, you've been hiding your light under a bushel, and it's time to let it go Jen. And, and it's powerful. And you are doing

it a for your students, the next generation, your teachers and women, and it's powerful, any closing remarks, and that was kind of a nice closing, but any closing remarks that you want to share with the audience, before we wrap up?

T

Tesha Fritzgerald 55:57

I will say that every voice needs a safe zone, a safe space, find your safe space. And even in your safe space. Some things happen, that bring back memories, or that feel like they remind you of something bad has happened before. We don't connect the dots and hurt. We let the doors open and love. And I just want every woman listening to this podcast to know that there's a dream that is uniquely yours, that you're not pigeonhole by time or space, that you are not confined or constricted by whatever it is you believe that's keeping you in that one place, that if you have dreams, this is your season to explore those dreams. This is your permission slip. This is your permission slip, to dream big, to imagine yourself victoriously and to move into the next season of action. And so I hope that you're inspired to just explore the dream, but that you're compelled to move forward to take some action to make that dream come true.

J

Jennifer Malcolm 57:09

powerful. And I'm inspired by this I'm encouraged by this. As I'm stepping out in this space there is that Who am I? What am I going to bring that's different than someone else? Why me I have a you know some stuff in my past that brings up shame and, and disqualification and very powerful. So I am receiving that I am going to write myself a permission slip to Yes, ma'am, to go into the fullness of my calling and the destiny of my dreams, and to really allow other women to have that permission slip as well. So thank you so much for your time today. I am honored to call you, my friend, and be alongside you in the work of supporting and advocating for women and the voices to heal and to grow. And to find the courage and really honored that you could share this time with me today.

T

Tesha Fritzgerald 58:04

Thank you so much for having me such a blessing

J

Jennifer Malcolm 58:06

You are most welcome. So thank you all for tuning in today. We cannot wait to for you to receive the resources here with T shirts work and, and some of the things that she's connected to here in Cleveland. And we will catch you on the next episode of Jennasis

Speaks: The Transformative Power of Women's Stories where every woman has a story. And that story matters. And that means you alright, have a good one. Subscribe to the Jennasis Movement to empower women's voices and reclaim the power over your own narrative.